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THE NEGRO ELDORADO.

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THE NEGRO ELDORADO.

A LECTURE,

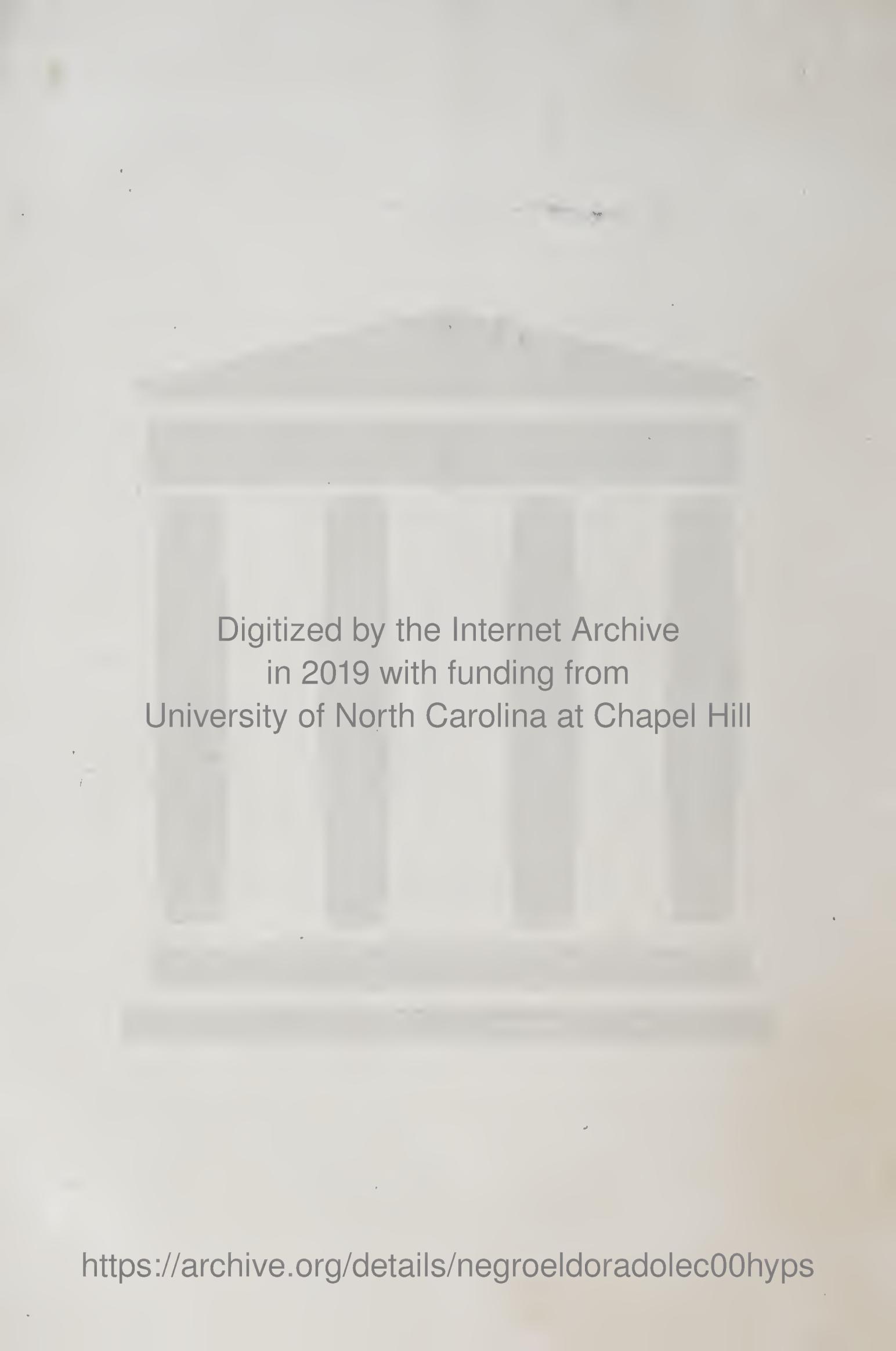
— AS DELIVERED BY —

Maggie W. Hypsher,

IN MANY OF THE CITIES IN

THE SOUTH ATLANTIC STATES.

1893.
DAILY REVIEW JOB PRINT,
WILMINGTON, N. C.

A very faint, large watermark-like image of a classical building with four columns and a pediment is visible in the background.

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INTRODUCTION.



Not for its greatness in eloquence, or scholarly ability, but for the plain, unvarnished facts, from a close and interested observer, I launch this little boat upon the turbulent waters of Negro Literature, hoping 'twill be the means of carrying some of the passengers from the great ship—cities of America—to a safer and better port—the rural towns of the Gulf States.

To my beloved and honorable father, JOHN H. WHITEMAN, of Wilmington, N. C., to whom I owe my success in life, and who, of all my friends in life, has been most faithful, this little effort is humbly, yet proudly, dedicated by

MAGGIE W. HYPHER.

THE NEGRO ELDORADO.

ONE of the greatest orators who ever swayed a multitude by the magic charm of eloquence or convinced an unwilling court by the power of reason or the force of logic, when graciously permitted to stand and speak for himself on a special occasion (and I speak for myself when I speak for my people) stretched forth his hand and said: "I think myself happy, O King, that I shall speak for myself to-day."

Were I speaking for myself alone I would forbear, feeling the subject an unworthy one, and not daring to intrude myself upon your valuable time. But I speak for a more unfortunate, oppressed, and yet worthy, portion of my family—the Negroes of the Gulf States—Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, in which states I lived during the winter and spring of '93, associating with, and studying the customs of, the people.

I stand as an humble representative for these people who have lived since that morning when the vaulted skies reverberated with the melting melodies and musical echoes of the singing stars and all the Sons of God shouted for joy.

To nobly represent such a people, I approach my task with trepidation and doubt. Remembering, however, that I am before an humane and intelligent audience, an audience that would be nothing unless charitable toward a fellow creature's honest efforts, I am constrained to challenge your patience and entreat you to hear me for my cause.

Beginning with the southern boundaries of Tennessee and the Carolinas, we have continued to the Southern Coast, where "the land stops and the water begins," where the sombre moans of the Mexican Gulf are echoed in the weird sighing of the pines near the bluffs where the intrepid De Soto "first beheld the turbid billows of the world's mightiest river, the imperial Mississippi, rolling in

solemn, silent grandeur to the sea." That is the country where is found an oppressed and ignorant people needing enlightenment and sympathy, and appealing for recognition and relief.

Many versions have been placed on the whys and wherefores of the state of the Negro in the extreme South; and when lecturing last January, in Northern Florida, while on a pleasure and business trip with my husband, a gentleman from Kentucky came to me after the lecture, asking me to furnish letters to a certain Negro Paper, in Kentucky, on the *Negro As He Is In The South*. Then it was that I became inspired to benefit, in my humble way, two sets of Afro-Americans at once.

The mass of Afro-Americans in the Gulf States need encouragement, teachings of industry, morality and economy. These lessons are to be taught by the Afro-Americans from the Carolinas, the Virginias, Georgia, Tennessee, and the states above Mason's and Dixon's Line, because those in the latter named states had better owners, better home training and earlier advantages of education, on a whole, even while slaves.

In the dark recesses of the great caverns of earth are found conical bodies formed by the slowly oozing drops of chemical liquid, for numberless centuries standing in the blackness of subterranean night, rough, uncouth and shapeless; yet when the electrical oscillation of light is let in on these hidden figures, they present a sight of bewildering beauty and resplendent glory.

So, drop by drop, from the fountains of the soul, and sigh by sigh, from the miseries of his many sufferings, through the many years of environment, oppression and strange vicissitudes of life, have formed on the gloomy plantations of the South, this Negro Race possessing all the stalactites of love, pity, sympathy and compassion, which reach down to meet the up-rising stalagmites of sorrow, grief, pain and distress, as do other people; and when lit up by the effulgent rays of the sun of intelligence,

morality, religion and wealth, they present all the indescribable glories and beauties of God's highest creation—man.

As the first ship-load of Negroes brought to this country was landed on the coast of Virginia, we might, like Thomas Nelson Page in writing of the South, declare "There is no better starting point than that old colonial county, Virginia." We prefer starting where the mass of Negroes is, for, it is the mass of the South with which we have to deal this evening, and we assure our hearers that the Gulf States are the "black belt" of this country.

The Negro of the entire South is warm hearted and impulsive, yet suspicious, and when a Negro from the Carolinas, or even from Georgia, enters a town of one of the Gulf States, the inhabitants therein watch "dat Northern Nigger" with a stealth and distrust that are amusing, yet provoking. And though "dat Northern Nigger" presents plans, elevations, and means of money-making fairly and justly before "Us Southerners," "Us Southerners" swear "its a trick," "dem people's fixin' to rob us," and advise others not to participate; and after all, let their curiosity run away with their previous statements and join "dem Northern Niggers" with a will and an energy that are surprising.

In these states we find no colored people; they are all "White-Folks and Niggers." The Whites call us "Niggers," and the Negroes call one another "Niggers."

After leaving the Carolinas, every thing is done to impress the Southern Negro that he is a little lower than a dog, instead of "an angel." Particularly is it so regarding riding on the railroads.

On most of the roads the coaches set aside for Negroes are little more than pig-pens. In these states the coaches are respectively labeled outside, in large white letters, "For White People," "For Negroes." On some branch roads, the Negro coach is next to the engine.

Notwithstanding this deplorable state, I am forced to the conclusion that we make it as bad as it is, for ourselves, and I do not blame the railroad companies, to a certain extent. I think a line should be drawn by all means. There should be a first and second-class fare, as in the Carolinas and the Virginias, and one's money and appearance, as well as conduct, determine accommodation. There are white people of the illiterate, non-progressive class beside whom I would disdain to sit. And when I'd stand and see that class entering and occupying respectable cars, while Negroes of the highest culture and refinement, paying the same money, were forced into the "Jim Crow Car," the hot blood of indignation would rush through my veins with a rapidity equal to that of the mighty Mississippi in its swollen state; my womanhood would assert itself, and from the depths of my heart would arise so mighty a cry for a removal of the hand of oppression, that for a while, my body would seem rent in twain. Then I'd enter the Negro coach, there beholding Negroes of all colors and grades, huddled together like so many cattle in a crowded pen. There you would see men, women and children with unkempt hair, some barefooted and ragged, with children who seemed to know not the virtue in water and soap. By their sides, where they had eaten, I'd see on the seats old meat, bones, fragments of bread, potatoes, etc. On the floor would often be their baggage, consisting of bundles of various things tied in bandanna handkerchiefs. Sometimes one would have a pig tied on the floor, live chickens, raw fish, jugs of molasses, or more often, whiskey. In the winter the floor around the stove and the wall would be a pool of spittle causing any decent person's stomach to revolt at once, with all its might. The scent from tobacco, whiskey and old rotten pipes would repel the most determined.

Is it surprising, then, that when some cultured man or woman (though Negroes) entered such a place that they'd seek some far away corner from his own people?

A thousand times, No; and yet the very next time the train stopped, some man, scented with tobacco and smoke, and whose body needed soap, water and clothes, would enter and, if possible, seat himself beside the most decent looking woman in there. The Negro men do not respect the Negro women! How can they expect other races to do so? Of course, in the rural districts it is so very bad; but in every community there are families of the highest order, worthy exemplars of any people.

Florida, though the newest state of them all, is by far, in many respects, the best. The state is being built up and peopled by Northern whites who infuse their thrift, cleanliness, intellectuality, morality, etc. into communities that have been neglected. This influence reaches and affects the working classes.

From the South Atlantic States come the teachers, lawyers, preachers, doctors and other professional and trades men who go into families, start homes, churches, schools and business, setting examples for good that have a lasting and eternal impression. The result is, we find more professional young men—successful ones—and more drug stores and fine houses of merchandise, owned and managed by young Negroes, in Florida than in any other state in the Union. As proof, we refer you to the many hundred advertisements of these various establishments, carried by Prof. H. M. Hypsher, East Tennessee's great Sterioptician. In the ports of Florida, like Jacksonville and Pensacola, a Negro book-keeper became to our eyes a common sight. In Florida, Jacksonville is the Negro Athens. There we find schools, under many churches, doing a Herculean work. In this city the Evening Times, a white paper, devotes a page of its worthy self to the Negro, with a Negro editor.

We must not leave Jacksonville without mentioning Dr. Williams of the M. E. Church. A more perfect christian, Chesterfield-like and scholarly gentleman we never met. After exhibiting in his great church to his

cultured congregation, we were honored by being allowed to sit at his feet, as at a Gamaliel's, and listened to a sermon on "Lynch Law," which we wish could have been thrown to the world in letters of fire, burning, so to speak, the defiler of law and the midnight assassin. We would like to speak individually of Rev. Baily, the great Baptist Divine of Tallahassee, and many other great and good men and women who are doing the work of a Hercules, each; but time admonishes me to hasten.

In Florida we find many men of color owning from one to two orange farms. These orange growers, during the season, easily ship a thousand boxes of oranges at two and a half dollars per box. But we must leave the land of flowers and pay what the ladies term a fashionable call —(which means a short one,) during which one does not lay off hat or wrap—to old Alabama.

We crossed this state three times, resting the last time at Birmingham, as the name invites us to do. Leaving Pensacola, Florida, on the night train of March 31st, we secured, through a friend, a sleeper for Mobile, Alabama, into which city we rushed on the early morning train of Easter Day while the city and its inhabitants were still wrapt in sleep. After a few hours rest we went to church and to "do" the city.

The people of Mobile belong to the highly intellectual order, possessing much of the dark beauty of the Creoles who are common to Mobile and the state of Louisiana. As do their white sisters, the women there dress very handsomely and gaudily; indeed, they look like beautiful butterflies, so gaudily are they dressed and so lightly do they trip about. As I stood and gazed at the beautiful (beautiful in many ways) women of St. Augustine, Florida, and Mobile, and walked up into the centres of the same cities where the old slave markets still stand, where God's image in ebony was once bartered and sold as so much chattel, I was forced to exclaim: What a powerful God! How fortunate am I in being the creature of His mercy!

We found the A. M. E. Z. Church monarch of almost all she surveyed in Mobile, with North Carolinians, Rev. Smyer, Elder Smith and others, in authority under the Episcopal guidance of the great Bishop Petty. Here we found our friend Mrs. Bishop Petty, whom we formerly knew as the beautiful Miss Sarah Dudley of Newbern, N. C., known for her personal charms and State fame as a newspaper writer, now developed into a more charming and handsome young matron, spending Easter with her friends and old schoolmate Mrs. Rev. Smith. The pleasure of our stay was greatly increased by meeting our friend of younger days.

Of course in Alabama, as in other Southern States, there is yet much need of heeding the Macedonian cry: "Come over and help us," but the State Normal School at Tuskegee, managed by the well known, loved and popular Prof. Brooker T. Washington, is a mighty sun whose effulgent rays penetrate some of the darkest corners of the state.

The people of Tuskaloosa, Alabama, a fine little town near Birmingham, live in a very intellectual atmosphere with such men of culture and ability as Profs. Barnes, Croton and Jones to the front, aided by the Presbyterian Theological Institute, Jones University, Rev. Sherman of the Zion Church, and others.

So great is the mixture of nations at Birmingham that, were it not for the difference in size, I'd think myself in a second New Orleans. People of every race, nationality, class and condition flocked to Birmingham during its boom several years ago; hence the educators have much material upon which to work.

Dr. W. G. Alexander, of the A. M. E. Church, Rev. Jordan, of the Sixth Ave. Baptist Church, Dr. Warner, of the Zion Church, and Rev. T. W. Walker, of Shiloh Baptist Church, are certainly men of culture, ability, eloquence and executive power, working individually, and we trust collectively, for the continuance of the Master's kingdom

and the elevation of fallen humanity. We have never heard more angelic music than that coming from the choirs of Dr. Alexander and Rev. Jordan, seeming to "Vie with Gabriel as he sings in notes almost divine."

There is a great work to be done in the great coal and iron mining regions of Alabama where hundreds, yea thousands, of Negro miners live with their families, making from thirty to a hundred dollars each, per month, yet living from hand to mouth, many of them being paupers two days after they've drawn their month's wages. Some few, however, we find with a bank account and looking out for a rainy day.

We want such men and women as Prof. and Mrs. W. H. Hollin, who left their comfortable home in Jackson, Mississippi, went to the Johns Mines, Alabama, and there are teaching by example what precept would fail to reach.

In a certain sense we can term Mississippi and Louisiana one state, for the people of both races are very much alike, and we think that the inimical feelings between the two races are far more prevalent than in the other states. The Negroes' fear of the "Crackers" of Florida and the "Mossbacks" of Alabama is rapidly abating, but when you tell one in Mississippi of the "Sages" and the "hooziers" and the "planters" of Louisiana, he begins to tremble. Of course, in the cities it is nothing like so bad; but in the small towns, villages and settlements, the topics talked of to strangers are, a certain massacre, lynching, whipping, white capism, etc. True, Louisiana has had a Negro governor, and Mississippi a Negro lieutenant governor, but on many of the plantations the Negro is still a slave. On the plantation where hundreds of them live, they are in bondage until Saturday and Sunday. On these days they crowd the cars, going from one plantation to the other, visiting relatives and friends, actually talking about "Marse So and So," cringing and peeping at the conductor and every other white man, acting as though

they did not know that the war was over, and dressing in the most amusing and ridiculous manner.

In and around the great, yet wicked, city of New Orleans, we find the Negro imitating his white brother by doing his big marketing and shopping on the Sabbath; having his biggest cock fights, glove contests and base ball games on the Christian's great rest day, and in every way possible desecrating that holy day that is set aside and belongs to the "Giver of every good and perfect gift." I stood at my bed-room window on a Sabbath afternoon in April, '93, and looking in through the window of a fencing hall, there beheld Negro pugilists fight round after round till one was knocked down and lay senseless for three hours. This was in Donaldsonville, Louisiana.

At the next station, White Castle, we found Rev. A. L. Reese, of the Baptist church, leaving no stone unturned in his endeavor to bring the wanderer home. Rev. Reese is a cultured, practical, Christian gentleman who grasps opportunity by the forelock. Assisted by a refined, christian wife, he draws his large congregation around him, teaching them life and eternity lessons, as a father does his children. Truly we find here, a great man, filling a needy place.

In the city of Jackson, Mississippi, we find the people above the average Mississippian, intellectually. We find the work of Northern philanthropists and well educated Negroes driving ignorance and superstition as doth the fire the dry prairie grass of the West, and in their stead (ignorance and superstition) we find refined homes, great institutions of learning, and in fact, the Negro men and women walking all the higher courts of enlightened man. It was in this city, (Jackson,) that we found several Negro men doing reportorial work for Northern and Central States white papers.

In the rural districts of the Gulf, as well as other states of the Union, the Negro catches on to big sounding words and phrases, indulging in them plentifully, without

regard to meaning, and thinks he makes a big catch when doing so. I remember one very dark night as we got off the train at Forest, Mississippi, there was no light whatever in the "Colored Waiting Room," and turning to me, Prof. Hypshei remarked: "We surely ought to have a light of some kind here," whereupon a bright and sprightly looking colored gentleman replied: "No sah! we aint high nuff contaminated in dis place mong de white folks for dat;" meaning that the white people do not estimate them highly.

One has but to look out of the car window, when stopping at small stations, to see Uncle Tom's Cabin in reality. You see a Topsy, Aunt Cloe, Sambo, Quimbo and a LeGree all along the line. At every stop Negro men and boys come in the cars, take a drink of ice water from the cooler, make a big spit on the floor, examine the faces of the passengers and walk out with the air of a Custom House Inspector.

But, after all, the intellectual Negro with energy and enterprise, living in the South, is a little king; so many resources are open to him, whereas in the North the tradesman and professional man are the exception; and the majority are janitors, coachmen and waiters. In the South the order is reversed, and as the mass of Negroes live in the South, every town of four thousand and upward can well support two Negro physicians, one good drug store, one dentist, two lawyers, six teachers, ten dressmakers, one milliner, twelve carpenters, eight brickmasons, six painters; and then there will be Negro families needing cooks, nurses, washerwomen, etc. The South is our Eldorado, did we but know it. Here we get every day, for a mere trifle, fresh provisions, vegetables, melons and, in fact, nearly every thing to eat; (a family in the Gulf States without a vegetable garden is throwing away money.)

There are small towns in the four states with which we've tried to deal, perishing for the need of educated, common-sense men and women who ought to leave the cities,

go out and teach my people how to gather the golden harvest actually lying at their feet.

O, men and women of the trades and professions in many of the cities, living on starving rates, arise and betake yourselves to the small towns and rural places of the South! Around many of the mines of Alabama a teacher easily secures a \$60 per month position and a dressmaker can make \$50 per month.

After having gone into all sections of the country, covering many of the territories and states, I am constrained to believe that the Negro himself must solve his problem with intellectuality, morality and wealth.

We have gone into what were termed the "meanest small towns" of Georgia and Alabama and have had great courtesies shown us by what were termed the "meanest white people." We have exhibited in some of their best white academies, often to audiences two-thirds, yea four fifths, white.

Remember the dark, unhappy past; remember how many Negroes fell victim of the lash and the prey of the blood-hound. Remember how blessed you are, and that on *you* devolves the duty to carry the light of education, in which light there are thousands of rays shedding cleanliness, religion, morality, wealth etc.

Young men and women, pouring out from the schools and colleges, I congratulate you that it is yours to inhabit this future Elysium. I rejoice that you have lived to see the day when the passions that led the North and South into battle are over; you have caught the perfume of roses mellowed into softer memories of peace, and that the Negro which was the bone of contention and dissension proves that "A man's a man, for a' that."

I rejoice that you live in the day when you can set the example of fidelity and elevation for the race, and to show that men who died loyal to it and God have produced sons and daughters of the same stamp, with greater opportunities and of whom any race might well be proud.

All honor to the brave mothers and fathers of the past! To those who fell ere the victory was ours, beyond the west where the day piles up its splendor, I send this greeting to their spirits.

All honor to the great men and women of to-day who dare to come over and help us!

Hail, followers of God and right! Hail, glorified and risen champion of the race! Your courage has at last partaken of your triumphs, and the ills to which you were subjected are at last slowly being righted. Heaven's slow justice is at last arriving, and in the morning light of God's own perfect day your principles will be vindicated.

And to those of us who go forth to the rescue of our more unfortunate brothers and sisters, let me advise that we commend ourselves to Him who straightens the crooked paths, fills the valleys, brings down the mountains, and in a thousand more mysterious ways proves the "Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man."

FINIS.

